

Art in Early Childhood

Nature Art



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Nature and the Arts in Early Childhood

The Arts and time in Nature are fundamental to a child's development and combined they provide the child with creative explorations that help nurture their **whole being** - body, mind, heart and spirit.

Method and Practice:

I take my inspiration from the Natural World, ever since I was a very young child I have been in awe of nature, that sense of wonder and curiosity about the natural world has never left me, it has grown deeper with age. My work is deeply based on my belief that ***nature and art are interwoven in us***, they are part of what makes us human and when we are separated from either, it creates an imbalance. Mother Nature embodies everything I know to be true...love, beauty, creativity, purity, soul, breath, sustenance.

My work as a facilitator for joy-filled learning, is based on my own early childhood, my personal experiences as a mother of 3 and my experience running an outdoor nature-based art classroom for 8 years for age groups - 5 -7 years (we frequently had both, younger and older children join us for the day) The nature based art processes and activities I share here can be adapted for younger and older age groups.

Please watch VIDEO 1 to accompany the pages 1-8



To help explain my method and practice, I would like to share with you two short passages, one from Rachel Carson's charming book "A Sense of Wonder" and the other "Interbeing" by Thich Nhat Hahn. Please take a moment to view both passages found on video one.

A Sense of Wonder by Rachel Carson

If children are to keep alive their inborn sense of wonder, they need the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with them the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. For those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. Parents often have a sense of inadequacy when confronted with a world of complex physical nature, inhabited by a life of various and unfamiliar that it seems hopeless to reduce it to order and knowledge. In a mood of self-defeat, they exclaim, How can I possibly teach my child about nature "why, I don't even know one bird from another!"

Rachel Carson believed that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel. And I wholeheartedly agree. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.

Rachel continues with - The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts that he is not ready to assimilate.

This passage highlights the lack of confidence parents experience when taking their children outdoors, this is true for some educators too. This is also applicable to some educators in regards to the arts their lack of confidence, not being an artist.

Creating art in nature evokes joy, sparks imagination and laughter, awe and wonder, love, peace, contentment and enthusiasm.



Creativity is at the core of being Human - Richard Wagamese

The natural world for me - is alive with the Arts; music; poetry and the abundant stories of the land. It is the wild organic arts that I wish to share with my students both young and old so that they too can feel the love, appreciate the beauty and wonder of the world, be inspired to express their feelings, thoughts and ideas; helping to develop their curious minds, grow a love and understanding of the arts and their unique way in which they experience, view and express the world around them.

Nature is forever inviting us to ***play, explore and create***. I believe this to be one of the most natural, pure, organic ways of learning, through creative play that explores many mediums and art forms, enabling us to express our creative outputs.

The second passage I wish to share with you is a beautiful verse about our interconnectedness and I believe if all children learned this poem at school along with their teachers and parents; the world would indeed be a happier and more peaceful place. The first time I read this poem - it stirred my imagination and was my inspiration for an art project I collaborated with other artists to bring to many schools - The Music and Spirit of the Trees.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE and an appreciation for the Arts

My findings over the years after running art workshops in many different schools both here in BC, Canada and Britain was that some educators lacked confidence in taking the children outdoors and equally some educators lacked confidence in their own creativity. This may stop the educator from sharing outdoor time and certain art projects that are fundamental to a child's development. I also found most art was cookie cut, rushed and was almost always product over process.

Addressing these issues: Nature Art

By combining nature with art we can help the educator reawaken their deep-rooted connection to the natural world and their unique language with which the arts ignites. I have found this nature based art process incredibly successful in building confidence and awareness. Helping educators **fall in love** with nature and the arts is a joy-filled experience. We protect what we love!!!

Playing with visual arts materials before offering them to children is a great way to build your own confidence and understanding of the materials.

Infusing the arts into all subjects is possible“ we just need to put our imaginations to work. This is an incredibly fun and joy-filled experience, exploring possibilities and learning along side our students. Playful nature art helps develop a child's unique perspective and individual style of creative expression.

We are learning through **our senses** as we play, observe, explore and investigate the changing seasons throughout the year. Our senses allow us to grow, to feel, to protect ourselves, and to enjoy the world and appreciate it's beauty.



First, we need to realise we are all artists, **to be creative is to be human.**

Secondly, we need to understand that **we are part of nature**, we are not separate from the natural world.

If we look back in history, we created everything we needed to survive with our mighty hands. Shelter, fire to keep us warm, tools in order to hunt, vessels to drink and eat from, musical instruments to entertain ourselves and paint to record our feelings and emotions through creative expression. Creativity is part of being human, it is in our DNA.



These rich authentic experiences such as making our own earth paint and our very own paint brushes provide opportunities for children to exchange ideas, explore and consider solutions through collaboration.



In this presentation, I wish to share with you several natural art mediums we can create ourselves from materials found in nature which provide infinite possibilities for creative explorations with your students. Creating our own art materials is a magical way to connect with the natural world as an organic process in itself.

PLAY IS EVERYTHING!

We learn through Play and Nature Invites us to Play...Explore, Imagine, Create!

Childhood is a time of Wonder. A time to explore the natural world through our senses - ***nature invites us to be creative.*** Creativity is brought to life in children's exploration of and relationship to the natural world. It is our relationships that hold true to a joy-filled learning.

In this presentation you will discover how you can combine nature and art in ways that provide opportunities for the students' curiosity to engage their minds, their imaginations to take flight and their creativity to blossom and flourish, gifting great joy in expressing their ideas, thoughts and emotions through playful creative adventures.

When your ***heart is fully awakened*** you hear the music, the poetry, the love, the invitation to dance with nature and when you do, the music, the love, the beauty seeps into every part of your being and how can you not feel inspired to create...it is an organic flow of love; of spirit.



FORMING RELATIONSHIPS (And rediscovering Relationships)

Land Artist, Andy Goldsworthy once wrote “We often forget that WE ARE NATURE. Nature is not something separate from us. So when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we’ve lost our connection to ourselves.”

I wholeheartedly agree with that, and believe that ART, especially nature art, can truly help us rediscover that connection. Children instinctively know of this connection, it is part of us, we are all part of the natural community. When we provide time for children to interact with nature, through creative explorations, they undoubtedly gain a better understanding of that connection.

It is both an honour and privilege to be a fascinator for joy-filled learning through creative exploration. And it is my responsibility to provide a happy, healthy environment where my students can experience the visual arts while forming relationships not just with the art materials but with the nature around them and the other students and myself. I provide the materials and a supportive environment allowing the children to explore and experiment for themselves - revisiting materials helps build confidence and ability to work with the art material. I also believe we can offer provide guidance and feedback when needed and interaction as I have found my students enjoy discussing their ideas.



Each time the child touches, smells, explores, climbs, observes a tree, she is forming a relationship with the tree and building a visual library.



I would like to continue with the theme of trees/forest and share with you why **nature art** plays an important role in my practice as a facilitator for joy-filled learning.





ART IS A LANGUAGE

Please take a moment to write down why you feel art is important in early childhood.

WE ARE PART OF NATURE

Now take a moment to write down why you think spending time in nature is important in early childhood .

How might you combine nature and art in your classroom?

Child As Tree

Growing and learning
alongside nature

Child as tree

Looking at the similarities of a child and a tree sapling. First, let's look at the forest, it is a community of trees. Now let's look at the classroom, it is a community of beings made up of children and adults. Focusing in on the trees in the forest what do we notice?

A Healthy Forest

The trees are unique, incredible, soulful beings of varying size and shape and colour (a hundred shades of green) developing and growing at different stages.

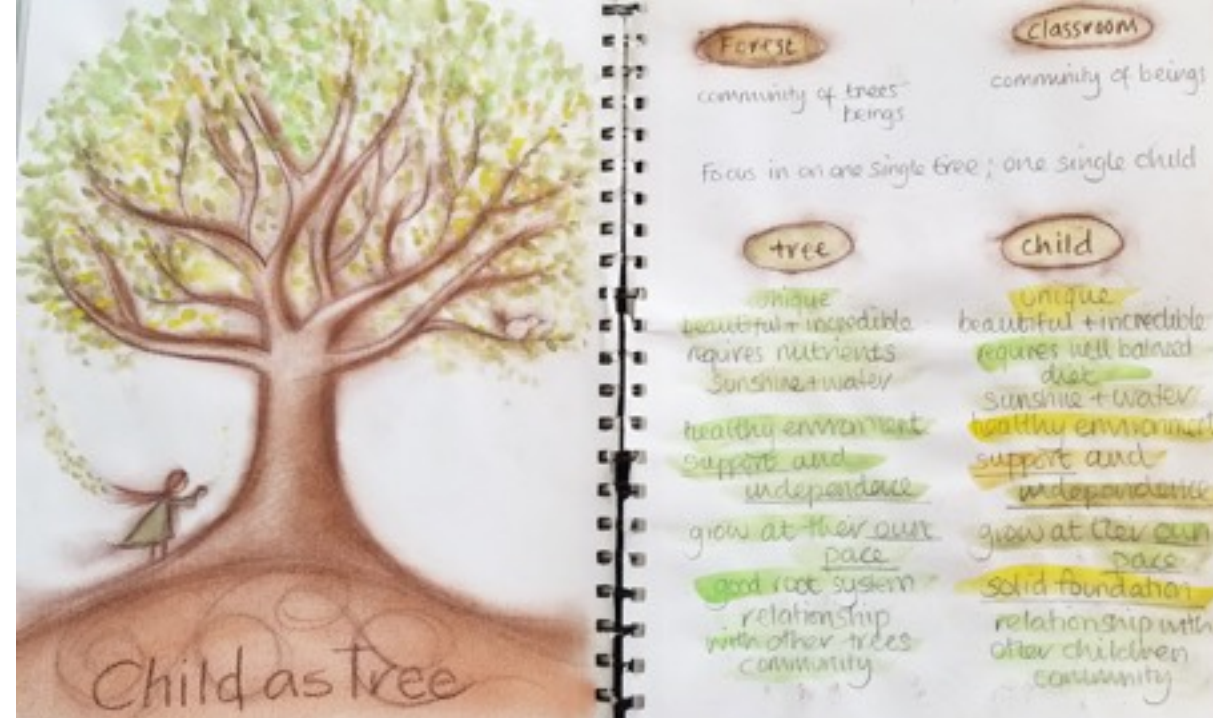
Each tree sapling requires: nutrients, sunshine and water, a healthy, safe environment and depends on the support of the other trees in the community from time to time but also requires space and time to grow independent.. Each tree can only exist thanks to the community - they are interdependent on each other. The trees are deeply connected physically and emotionally.

A Healthy Classroom

The children are unique, incredible and beautiful, soulful beings of varying size and shape and colour (a hundred shades of skin) and each child growing and developing at their very own unique pace.

Each child requires: a good healthy balanced diet, sunshine and water,. A healthy, safe environment/classroom. Providing our students with access to rich art experiences in their daily lives alongside time in nature is important in creating a healthy environment where joy-filled learning can be experienced. Each child requires support from time to time from the other members of the community but requires time and space to be independent.

Each child can only exist thanks to the community - they are interdependent on each other.. We are deeply connected physically and emotionally. So we can conclude from looking at the similarities of child and tree sapling that they are very similar in what they need when they are young,





A tree sapling needs a healthy environment and a good root system to grow into a strong healthy tree.

A young child also needs a healthy environment and a good solid foundation to grow into a strong healthy happy intelligent adult.

The foundation is built in the early years. As adults in care of children, we have a responsibility to provide a happy healthy environment in which the children can grow and flourish. Supporting each child's unique individual needs so they can blossom into who they need to be.



Supporting their individual needs in order for them to grow, flourish and blossom. Art and nature are fundamental to a child's growth, nature art nurtures the **whole child**: body, mind, heart and spirit.

We can observe...how the young tree sapling dances in the wind...we too can dance like the tree...we can notice how the tree changes over the seasons - how do we change over time?

We can notice that every tree is unique and beautiful - how each tree's bark is different. The bark of a tree is like our skin. We too are all different. As we observe and notice the differences in the tree we can observe and explore and celebrate our differences through wonderful creative explorations.

How might you explore these differences in your classroom?

What Art Processes and nature based art experiences could you provide for your students.

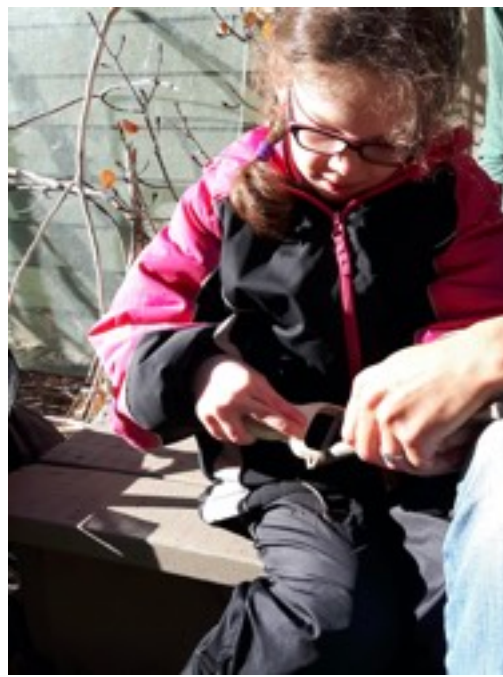




Isla asked for help in tying a knot in her yarn so we did it together. She was then capable to tie several more herself.



Offering support when needed. Elise had never whittled before. I held her stick while she practiced with the potato peeler, she was then able to master the peeling of the bark herself. She loved it so much she created 5 little stick beings.



Learning Alongside Nature

Nature is a great teacher and as we learn along side nature, we discover more about ourselves and our connection to the natural world, to each other and our interconnectedness to all creation. This learning doesn't stop when we leave school, it becomes a beautiful way of life!



Older students sketch the trees they befriended the year before

Sketching and painting the local trees, nurtures a deeper relationship with the natural world and an appreciation for visual art.



'Only through freedom and environmental experience is it practically possible for human development to occur.' Montessori

The students lost themselves in the vibrant flow of their very own, unique creative energy



One Single Tree - Taking inspiration from Canadian artist Emily Carr the students from an urban school were invited to paint their own dancing tree(s) after observing the one single tree dancing in the wind.



I think Emily Carr would have loved the students soulful paintings!



We want to use paint that will easily flow with the child's paintbrush.

This process is all about painting how we “feel” about the tree.

Its very important to allow the students to take their own time and not rush any of the above activities. It's very much about the process and not the finished product.

Please watch VIDEO 2 to accompany the pages 9-17



Chapter 3

Examples and Processes



Process Focused
Art Experiences

Bringing Outside Inside

Charcoal and Blackberries

Please watch VIDEO 3 to accompany the pages 18-37



Using handmade paint brushes



What could be more fun than experimenting with berries. Provide a selection of berries for the children to play with, explore, experiment using different natural items to paint and print with.



Fingers, sticks, tree discs, foliage are great for painting with berry paint. We can add water to dilute the colour and thickness of the **natural** paint.

Please make sure to watch the video on charcoal and berry paint.

SAFETY

Always make sure the berries are not poisonous and young children will undoubtedly put their fingers in their mouths.

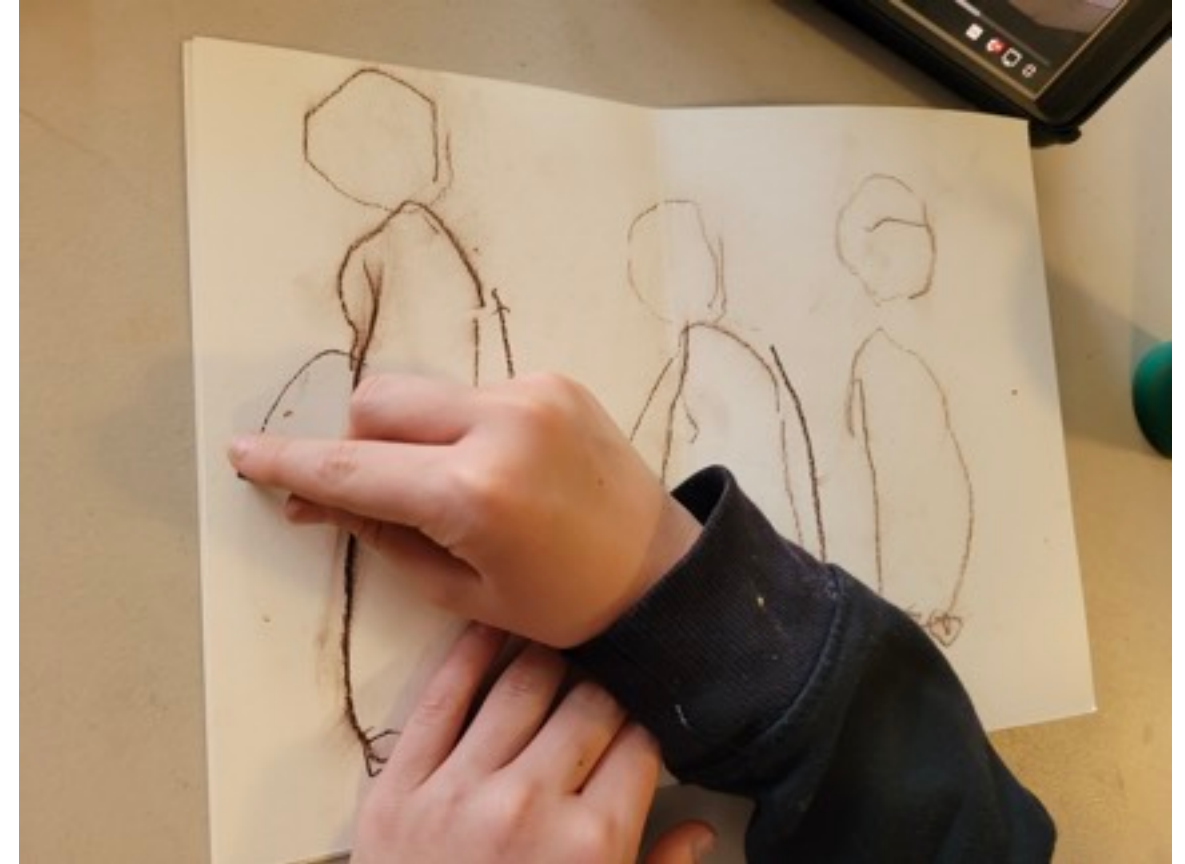
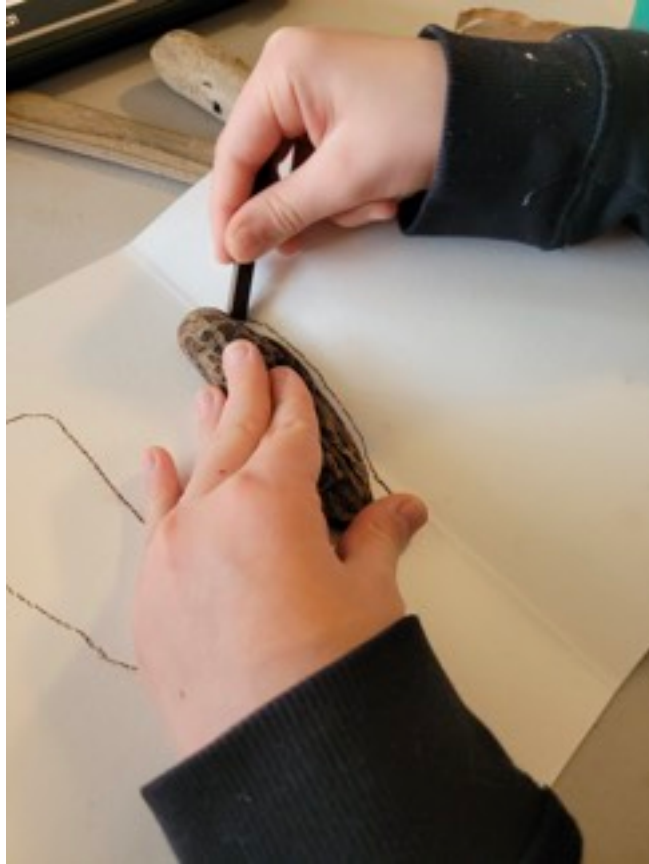
CHARCOAL



Conte and Earth Paint

Exploring shape, colour, texture using driftwood, conte and earth paint

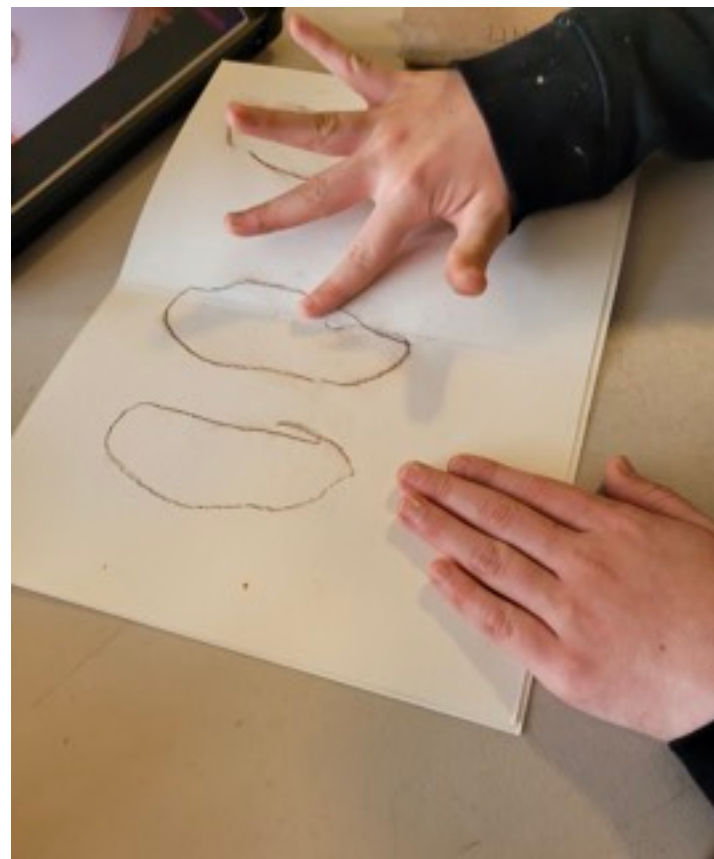




Imagination

An invitation to explore with **conte** using driftwood and rocks. Driftwood is a wonderful smooth wood (fallen branch) and incredibly versatile for art explorations.

What happens when I rub my finger over the conte?



Colour Exploration - how might we represent the classroom of pupils and the forest by colour?



Classroom - community of beings Forest - community of trees

How might we paint a hundred shades of Green in the Forest?



Colour exploration - how might we represent the classroom of pupils and the forest by colour?

Seeing Trees as Beings

The more time a child spends among the trees, touching, smelling, climbing, exploring the bark, the branches, how the tree sways and dances in the wind, observing the animals, birds and insects that visit the tree. How the tree changes over the seasons can help the students see how similar we are to trees. Just one single tree can offer infinite learning opportunities for the students.





We then invite the students to take their artwork for a walk...discovering many shadows along the way.



An invitation to explore shades of green found in the forest using watercolour inks on fabric canvas. Painting on fabric is very different to painting on paper. What might happen when we add more water? Mixing, experimenting, discovering...





Following the seasons we notice the changes the trees go through - we too can explore the changes we go through over time. These beautiful observations of the silver birch trees in Autumn were a starting point for the students to discuss what changes they had experienced of late.



How would you paint a hundred shades of Skin that could represent our classroom community?



Soulful Nature Art

We are all branches of the same tree

Little Stick Beings



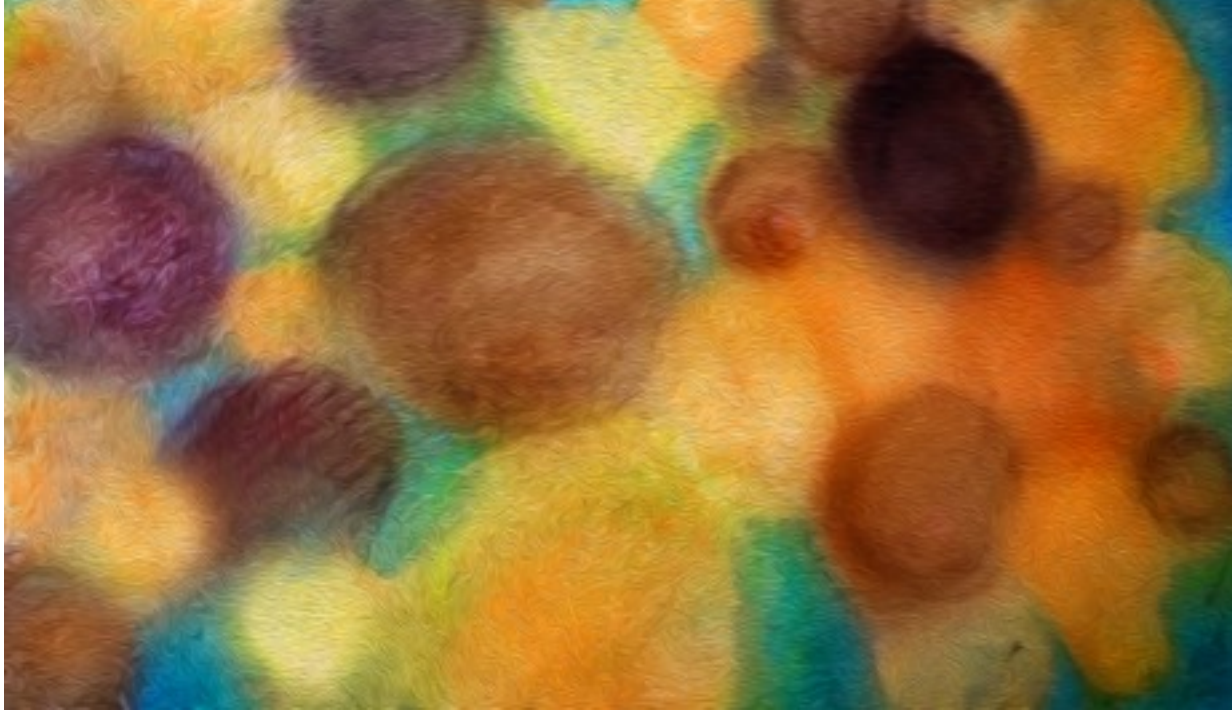
The creative process involves the child searching for a fallen branch, sanding the branch down. This little branch can represent the child. We can add a face. The little beings become beautiful playful beings for all sorts of creative explorations, storytelling, acting our roles, etc.....



WE ARE PART OF THE EARTH COMMUNITY



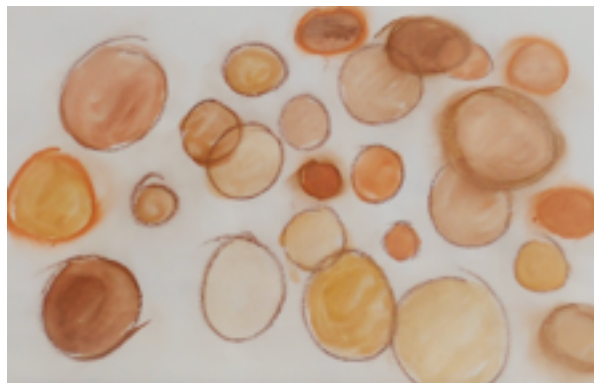
Exploring the treasure gifted to us by the trees - we say thank you for the gifts of fallen cones, pine needles, leaves, branches and take only what we need.



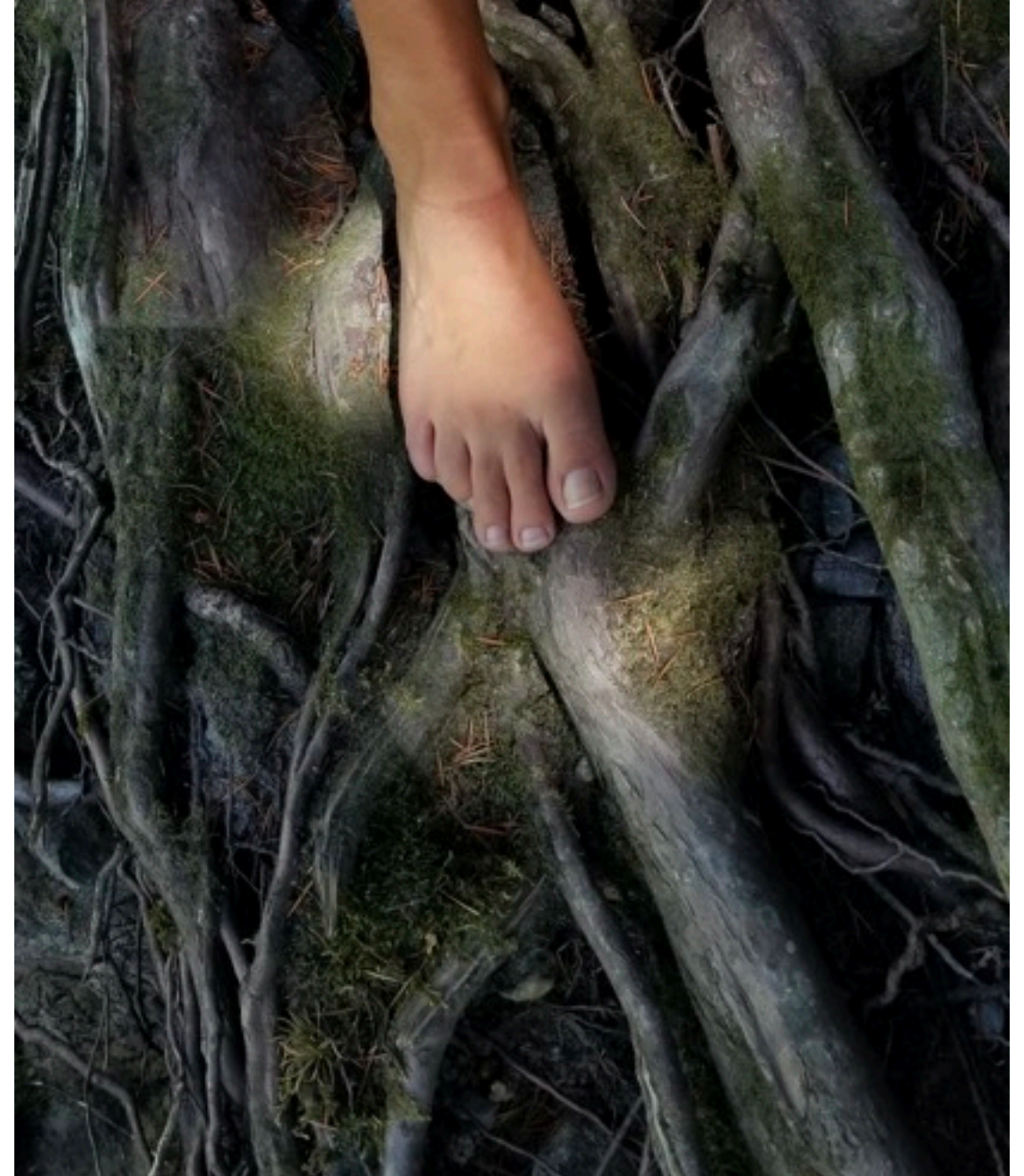
We can use any medium to create our different shades of skin colour. We experimented with watercolour and coffee. We also explored oil pastels and chalk pastels and conte.

I love using oil pastels and inviting the students to see what happens when we rub coconut oil over the pastels...go on have a go - its so much fun.

Adding coconut oil to blend the colours deepens the richness of the colours...we are one vibrant community.



Rainbow Eucalyptus - The bark of each tree is unique. Investigate the bark of many trees in your neighbourhood.



Remember there is a whole other community underground to investigate too! The possibilities for art explorations are infinite...isn't the natural world amazing!



A Complete Community

As I played with the possibilities of how we could explore the hundred shades of green of the forest, and the hundred shades of skin, through art processes, the similarities became very clear...the art process ended up gifting me the answer, as art often does (a powerful tool).

Blending the two communities (forest and classroom) represented by colour together - provided me the answer - when humans and nature are together, we become A COMPLETE COMMUNITY. A beautiful, vibrant, nurturing and healthy community.



Photographing the image among wild grasses at the entrance to the forest brought the image to life





Choices and ways of using materials?

What outcomes do you envisage and hope for your students, regarding the art materials and natural items from nature? I loved using the berries and hoped that my students enjoyed the sensory experience of exploring with berry ink. A great starting point to ask the students what materials might they like to explore next.

What natural materials would you like to collect? What do the natural materials mean to you? How can we make sure our students get the opportunities to choose their own materials.





One of my students at home experimenting with blackberries and charcoal. She loved this sensory experience and has been sharing her excitement for painting with berries with her sister.

ONE SINGLE TREE

OPEN ENDED NATURAL MATERIAL

- * Pinecones, seeds, pine needles, sticks, blossom, nuts, fruit, foliage can all be used for open ended exploration
 - * We can create land art with the natural materials
 - * We can paint with the natural materials and make our own paint brushes
 - * We can make our own art materials such as earth paint, inks, charcoal
 - * Storytelling with nature - visual stories using driftwood, rocks, sticks leaves
- What story is hidden within the leaf? The branch? The blossom from the ch
- One piece of bark can be a starting point for a watercolour exploration or a paper exploration using layers to create a bark effect...let the imagination go

* Possibilities are infinite

FALLEN BRANCH

Art Processes and Creative Explorations/Product
Possibilities are infinite! Here are just a few...

- * Explore the texture, smell, shape of the stick
- * Driftwood - Once a tree - secrets to unfold - stories to share
- * Natural Paint Brush - make your own - branch, foliage, twine
- * Driftwood to explore shape, texture, use of conte and berry paint
- * Imagine what your stick could be
- * Fairy Homes and Den Building
- * Stick Being - leads to oral and illustrative storytelling, imaginative play
- * Musical Instrument - Bell Shaker - music and movement

OBSERVATIONS

Art Processes and Creative Explorations/Product

- * How would we paint a hundred shades of green found in the forest
- * How would we paint a hundred shades of skin colour in the classroom/community
- * Who are the visitors to the tree?
- * Visitor one - Birds How do we paint bird song? Pastels/ coconut oil/fallen branch
- * Visitor Two: Butterfly - Butterfly Blue Song - "*Butterfly Blue, this song is for you - gently you colour the morning*" What is colour is warming our hearts today?
- * Roots/Habitat - what's happening underground? who lives underground - under the tree
- * Observing changes throughout the day- shadows - draw the shadows - charcoal
- * What shapes can we find in the tree - let's look at a tree disc/cookie - leads us to explore the circle within the circle - kadinsky inspired art explorations

BARK AND LEAVES

Art Processes and Creative Explorations/Product

- * Bark Rubbing
- * Leaf Printing - Roller and Inks Leaf Rubbing - Pastels
- * Explore Tree within Leaf
- * Exploring different layers of bark - paper bark - layering
- * Skin as bark - bark as skin
- * Colour, texture, form of leaves and bark
- * Observing changes in the seasons
- * Storytelling with leaves - leaf creatures/beings/bugs

Love, honor and respect ; only take what you need and always give thanks for the gifts you receive from our Mother Earth

Driftwood Dragonfly Puppet

The possibilities of
creative adventures with a
fallen branch
are infinite.



Chapter 4

Conclusion



A Complete Community

Reflection

Trees were very much a part of my childhood and I felt exploring Child as Tree could be an interesting comparison between early childhood growth and a young tree sapling.

Noting how incredibly fortunate I was to grow up in an environment where there was an abundance of trees and being mindful that many have never had the opportunity to form a relationship with trees, especially now with so many living in an urban setting, I decided to focus in on one single tree and the infinite possibilities of creative explorations we can explore with just one tree.

As I played with the hundred shades of green of the forest and the many shades of skin colour in the classroom through joy-filled art processes, it became very clear the similarities...the art process ended up gifting me the answer as art often does. (A powerful tool). Blending the two colourful communities together gave me the answer - when humans and nature are together, we become A COMPLETE COMMUNITY. A beautiful, vibrant, strong, healthy community.

I hope that the videos have inspired you to look at possible creative ways that you can explore and investigate Child as Tree with your own students. How might you explore the concept of the forest as community, the classroom as community.

The examples in this presentation are invitations for each child (and educator) to create their very own unique art. Here I provide inspiration and a starting point. During the creative process, the child begins to form relationships with the art materials and the natural materials. It is important that children have opportunities to conceptualize their own art making, as it is through this journey of expressing their individual feelings and ideas that gives the child the most joy and satisfaction while they form their very own unique Art style

You will discover how one playful nature based art exploration leads into another organic creation and the dance is afoot...a most joy-filled journey and so it goes on flowing from one creation to the next. It is my spirit and imagination that unlock the stories that are secretly hidden in the treasure gifted from our Mother Earth, waiting for the right moment. You too can unlock the beautiful stories through playful, creative exploration using mediums of your choice - the possibilities are infinite!

The natural world for me - is alive with the Arts; music; poetry and the abundant stories of the land. It is the wild organic arts that I wish to share with my students both young and old so that they too can feel the love, appreciate the beauty and wonder of the world, and express their feelings, thoughts and ideas; helping to develop their curious minds, grow a love and understanding of the arts and their unique way in which they experience, view and express the world around them. Nature is forever inviting us to play, explore and create. I believe this to be one of the most natural, pure, organic ways of learning, through creative play that explores many mediums and art forms, enabling us to express our creative outputs.

Bio

Marghanita Hughes is an educator, artist, author, and illustrator, deeply committed to reuniting children with the natural world through art and the power of play. She is the founder of Educating the Heart with Nature an international nature based art program which provides solutions for educators, parents, and organizations wishing to reconnect children with nature and encourage them to explore and celebrate their creativity.

Marghanita's art projects focus on the interconnectedness we have with one another and all living things and can be integrated into any curriculum. She has written and illustrated many children's picture books and is a passionate advocate for outdoor play. She is a member of Artstarts in Schools. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, she currently resides in Canada with her husband David and their 3 grown up children.

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LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/marghanita-hughes-5b11493a/>



References:

Canadian Artist - Emily Carr Paintings Art Gallery of Greater Vancouver : <http://aggv.ca/>

British Artist John Ruskin - Noting the landscape - I am not trying to teach you to draw, only to see. To be a good artist one must be an observer.

Ref: The Sense of Wonder Rachel Carson, Harper & Row Publishers New York, 1965

Thich Nhat Hanh “ Interbeing - Ref: Peace is Every Step “
Thich Nhat Hahn 2012; Shambala Publshings,Inc USA

“Creativity is at the core of being Human” - Richard Wagamese
Butterfly Blue - song reference - Jon Sherman

PDFs to accompany Presentation

- Rachel Carson The Sense of Wonder
- Interbeing Thich Nhat Hahn
- My Early Childhood Education PDF

Items you will require for the presentation:

- Paper and pencil
- Oil or chalk pastels or crayons

FREE Workshop “ BIRD SONG - Personal Development “
How do we draw bird song? Use this workshop to inspire creative exploration with your students (Teacher as the Artist Section) Access workshop here: BIRD SONG “ <https://youtu.be/oAE-mdyLryE>





Videos

Child as Tree - One Single Tree -

How we can experience art processes and explore art activities using one single tree as our source of inspiration.


Child as Tree - A Forest is a community made up of trees, deeply rooted and interconnected, yet each tree is unique . Our classroom is also a community made up of many children, all unique individuals.

Video One: Intro; Method and Practice: Why Nature Art in Education

Video Two: Child as Tree - comparison between early childhood growth and a young tree sapling.

; Embracing the nature art teacher within; one single tree offers infinite possibilities for art explorations; Exploring what Community means to us

Video Three: Examples of art processes and creative explorations with natural materials; conclusion

The image shows two weathered wooden stumps in a forest setting. The stump on the left is decorated with several red heart shapes. The stump on the right is more elaborately painted with various colors including red, green, yellow, purple, and white, featuring abstract patterns and heart shapes. Two smooth stones are placed on top of the right stump. The background is a blurred forest floor with pine needles and a single pine cone visible near the base of the stumps.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Lkwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, and the Syilx Okanagan people for allowing us to live, work and play on their lands.